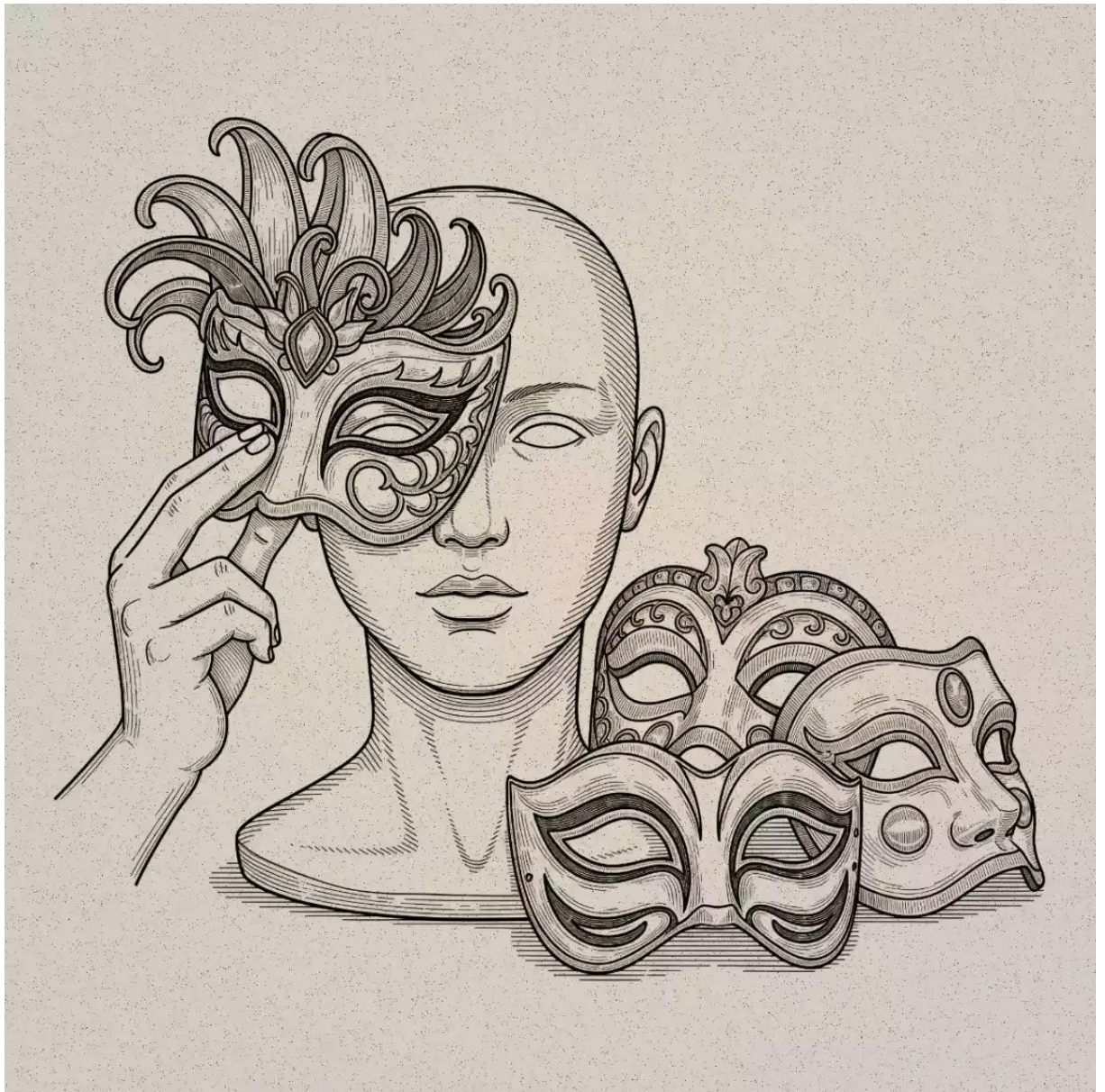


The Brand Name is the Stable Core of Identity, Not the Logo

By Raúl Belluccia



The name precedes the logo and is the entity's most fundamental asset. It guarantees continuity, even through visual changes, and circulates freely via word-of-mouth, building true recognition.

Every entity operating in the social sphere has a proper name to identify itself and be recognized. Having a brand means, first and foremost, having a name. It is impossible to design a logo without a name to begin with.

The meaning of the name is the institution it represents. Lacoste signifies "the company called Lacoste." The name, as a brand, is used as a sound in spoken language, as a word written with

alphabetic characters in texts, or as a stable form in visual marks.

Ford, IBM, the Louvre, the Red Cross, Motorola, the Ministry of Culture—these are names that are spoken, written in any typeface (as they are here), or displayed in the specific form of their logos.

The proper names of entities are words we all use in our daily lives. A group of dentists can speak or chat at length about brands of instruments and supplies for their practice simply by naming them, without any need to show the logos to be understood.

When we see a message from an entity—be it on a website, ad, social media post, poster, or packaging—we immediately recognize its visual mark, of course. However, its use as an identifying sign is exclusive to the issuer. Brands, as names, circulate freely, and anyone can mention them at will. This is the well-known "word-of-mouth" phenomenon, which is largely responsible for building a brand's image.

A name serves to identify—that is, to distinguish and recognize a specific entity from others. But in our perception, the name also becomes identified with the entity itself, forming a single, unified whole. The name and the named merge into one. The name Sony *is* the company Sony.

A name becomes associated with an entity's most stable and characteristic traits. A company can change its positioning, the type of products or services it offers, its tone of communication, or the personality it projects—even its logo. But as long as it retains its name, it remains the same entity. If we carefully analyze the sentence, "In 2021, Burger King changed its logo," we realize that Burger King itself did not change. The continuity of the name expresses the continuity of the entity as a living social "personality." Twitter ceased to exist; the entity continuing that social network is a different one, called X.

This strong identity between the name and the named entity means that the values attributed to an institution are more attached to its name than to its visual mark. When a company changes its logo, even drastically, the public's opinion of it does not change based on that fact alone.

I doubt anyone changed their opinion of the Animal Planet television channel when it swapped its purely typographic mark in various shades of green for the current blue elephant. The same is true for Volkswagen, BMW, Citroën, Renault, Peugeot, Audi, KIA, and many other famous automakers that not long ago abandoned their 3D logos in favor of new, flat designs.

It is possible to know an entity's name and have an opinion about it without ever seeing its logo. A person might know that Airbus is a major European company that manufactures passenger aircraft, that it is the main competitor to the American company Boeing, and that both are reputable and reliable—all while being completely unaware of or having forgotten their respective logos. I myself, as I write this article, must confess that I cannot recall the Airbus logo at all, assuming I have ever even seen it.

Beyond the messages issued directly by an institution, we hear, speak, and read its brand name a vast number of times. This circulation of the name is a powerful tool for building identification and recall for the entity.

This principle applies to all brands, not just massive or widely known ones. Last year, I took a watercolor class. On the first day, the instructor wrote more than fifteen names on the

board—that is, brands—of brushes, pencils, paint pans, papers, and specialty art supply stores. She also told us about their different qualities and which ones were best for us as beginners. Over the course of the class, we students began to internalize these names/brands and incorporate them into our conversations, even though they are unknown to the vast majority of the public.

The identifying marks we typically design are logos and symbols. Their responsibility for identification is immense, as they constitute the "signature" on each and every one of an institution's visual messages. And as we all know, designing them well is exceedingly difficult.

However, when designing symbols and logos, we often treat formal aspects—typography, color, style, symbol, and so on—as the sole identifying elements. In doing so, we forget that their purpose is to supplement and enhance the most fundamental identifier of all, the one that precedes them: the name.

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